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**GUIDELINES HELP MAKE SCHOOL LIFE A LITTLE EASIER FOR STUDENTS
WITH SICKLE CELL DISEASE**

September is Sickle Cell Awareness Month

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Children with sickle cell disease face more than math tests and homework when they attend school. Complications from the illness can affect school performance. This year, teachers in Virginia public schools will be better able to assist students who have sickle cell disease by using guidelines developed by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH).

“Understanding Sickle Cell Disease – A Handbook for School Personnel” was distributed to school nurses in July. The 30-page booklet provides a brief background on the disease, its physical complications and their warning signs. It also provides school personnel with specific steps they can take to care for the approximately 800 children with sickle cell disease who are enrolled in Virginia schools.

“The guidelines give teachers and staff a closer look at the physical and psychosocial complications of sickle cell disease and how they can be addressed in school,” said Jene Radcliffe-Shipman, manager of the VDH Virginia Sickle Cell Awareness Program.

Similar to children with other chronic illness, children with sickle cell disease are at increased risk for school absenteeism because of their illness. Unexpected episodes of pain and increased risk for stroke and chronic anemia are examples of the factors that complicate school performance.

Sickle cell disease is the most common genetic disorder found among African Americans. It also affects people from South and Central America, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. VDH estimates that approximately 3,000 Virginians live with the disease and another 115,000 carry the trait.

There is no universal cure for sickle cell disease, but those with the disease are living longer, healthier lives, thereby making academic achievement and career planning important to long-term success.

To view the school guide and other information about sickle cell disease, visit www.vdh.virginia.gov and click on Sickle Cell.

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